



Introduction

San Diego has the location and the physical foundation in general for an important, perhaps a great, city. Its people are awake to its needs, and are resolved to meet them.

John Nolen, 1908

Planning consultant John Nolen wrote these words as a preface to San Diego's first grand vision statement of the 20th century. He looked at a young city with a population of less than 40,000 and imagined what it could become.

Against the backdrop of what Nolen considered San Diego's "permanent attractiveness beyond all other communities," he envisioned development of a civic center of downtown public buildings, more urban open space, parks and playgrounds, and a bayfront with promenades and public amenities. He urged San Diegans to build a city that capitalized on its many natural assets and enviable climate. Nolen's goals are still relevant today and they advised many of the planning decisions that shaped San Diego in the past century.

Since the Nolen Plan was commissioned, San Diego has grown from a small border town to a thriving metropolis of nearly 1.3 million people, complete with many distinct and diverse neighborhoods. The city's growth and evolution have served as a catalyst for the development of numerous planning visions and plan documents. Through the years, all of the plans have shared a somewhat common vision. They have sought preservation of unique neighborhoods, good jobs and housing for all San Diegans, protection and enhancement of the environment, development of a diverse economy, an efficient and useful public transit system, well-maintained public facilities and services, and careful management of the growth and development of the city.

San Diego's Planning History

During the 1960s, the city engaged in a comprehensive planning process to prepare the first Progress Guide and General Plan, and in 1967 the City Council adopted and the electorate ratified that document as the first General Plan for the City of San Diego. In 1974, planning consultants Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard funded through a grant from the prominent San Diego Marston family, produced *Temporary Paradise?* This groundbreaking study focused upon the natural base of the city and region; it recommended that new growth complement the regional landscape to preserve its precious natural resources and San Diego's high quality of life. Although the city failed to follow many of its recommendations, *Temporary Paradise?* served



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as the foundation and major influence on the subsequent comprehensive update of the Progress Guide and General Plan adopted in 1979.

The city experienced both significant growth and a serious recession over the two following decades. Residential development reached the city's jurisdictional boundaries. As a result of the recession, the city's economic base evolved from tourism and defense to include high technology research and manufacturing, and international trade. The citizens of San Diego reacted to the growth and change by participating in numerous visioning efforts; they produced several documents, ballot initiatives, and programs of note: Urban Form Action Plan, Regional Growth Management Strategy, the Livable Neighborhoods Initiative, Towards Permanent Paradise, the Renaissance Commission Report, and many others.

Based upon the planning principles and shared common values in all of these documents, the City Council adopted the Strategic Framework Element in 2002 to guide the comprehensive update of the entire 1979 Progress Guide and General Plan and the implementation of the Action Plan. The 1979 Progress Guide and General Plan primarily addressed the development of vacant land and was largely successful in ensuring that new communities were built with adequate public facilities. It did not include an implementation program, however, to provide public facilities upgrades concurrent with infill growth in the older communities. New strategies, therefore, are necessary to address existing public facilities shortfalls and growth pressures within those neighborhoods.

A New General Plan

This General Plan provides a vision, core values and policy guidance to balance the needs of a growing city while enhancing quality of life for current and future San Diegans. It provides a strategy, the City of Villages, for how the city can enhance its many communities and neighborhoods as growth occurs over time. It does not, however, encourage or mandate a specific amount of growth. Rather, it presents nine elements that overall provide a comprehensive "blueprint" for the City of San Diego's evolution in the next twenty plus years.

The updated General Plan offers new policy direction in the areas of urban form, neighborhood character, historic preservation, public facilities, recreation, conservation, mobility, housing affordability, economic prosperity, and equitable development. It recognizes and explains the critical role of the community planning program as the vehicle to tailor the City of Villages strategy for each neighborhood. It also outlines the plan amendment process, other implementation strategies, and considers the continued growth of the city beyond the year 2020.



Vision

We have a special role as stewards of a remarkable resource, a city on the Pacific of great cultural and physical diversity. In the 21st century, as the city grows, San Diego must continue to evolve in harmony with its exceptional natural beauty, always treasuring the unique character of its neighborhoods, striving for equity, yet building a strong sense of connection to the rich mosaic that is San Diego.

Core Values

The following values provide the foundation of the General Plan. These values were developed with the guidance of the Strategic Framework Citizen Committee and through a multi-year dialogue with San Diegans in numerous community forums. They fall into three categories: our physical environment, our economy, our culture and society.

- The natural environment.
- The city's extraordinary setting, defined by its open spaces, natural habitat and unique topography.
- A future that meets today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
- The conservation, preservation, and environmental quality of natural resources.
- Parks and public spaces, accessible by foot, transit, bicycle, and car, as areas for neighborhood, community and regional interaction and convenient recreation.
- The availability of public facilities, infrastructure, transit, information infrastructure, and services as essential to neighborhood quality and as necessary companions to density increases.
- A compact, efficient, and environmentally sensitive pattern of development.
- Walkable communities with tree-lined streets.
- A convenient, efficient, aesthetically pleasing, and multi-modal transportation system.
- The health, economic prosperity, and well-being of our citizens.
- A diverse economy to achieve a rising standard of living for all San Diegans.
- Mutually beneficial cultural and economic ties with Mexico and our neighbors in Latin America.
- Regional coordination to resolve regional growth issues, and regional collaboration to meet economic prosperity goals.
- Social equity.
- Safe and secure neighborhoods.
- The physical, social and cultural diversity of our city and its neighborhoods.



- Housing affordability throughout the city and an overall diversity of housing types and costs.
- Schools as an integral part of our neighborhoods and equitable access to quality educational institutions.
- The city's multiplicity of arts, cultural, and historical assets.

The City of Villages Strategy

The City of Villages is a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges of growth while improving the quality of life for current and future San Diego residents. This strategy intends to focus growth into pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use village centers that are linked by a high quality transit network and served by public facilities, infrastructure and amenities needed to support the new growth. In addition, communities will be enhanced by creating vibrant village centers that increase access from jobs and residences to local shopping, services, and public amenities such as parks and libraries, while maintaining the unique character of neighborhoods. By directing growth primarily toward aging commercial shopping areas, the strategy works to protect natural open spaces from development pressure, preserve our single-family neighborhoods and conserve areas for employment growth.

The General Plan Elements

There are nine elements which comprise the new General Plan. All of the elements are interlinked through common goals and there is synergy between the elements. No one element takes precedent over another and each element must be considered in the context of the entire General Plan. Balancing a variety of important issues is a constant challenge. The General Plan has reconciled any apparent inconsistency between goals and policies of the various elements. It is the vehicle for dealing with competing interests.

Strategic Framework and Land Use- The Strategic Framework and Land Use Element includes citywide goals and a comprehensive strategy, the City of Villages, to determine where and how new growth and development should occur to ensure the long-term environmental, social, and economic health of the city and its many communities. It also provides the overall policy direction for future community plan updates and amendments, and the implementation program.

Mobility- The Mobility Element contains policies designed to help the city manage congestion and develop a multi-modal transportation network. This Element emphasizes the importance of linking land use and transportation planning. Its policies address the need to develop a balanced transportation system that meets the needs of drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.



Urban Design- The Urban Design Element offers guidance on how to create great buildings, neighborhoods, and public spaces. The policies strive to capitalize on San Diego's natural beauty and unique neighborhoods by calling for development that respects the natural setting, enhances the distinctiveness of our neighborhoods, strengthens the natural and built linkages, and creates mixed-use, walkable villages.

Economic Prosperity- The Economic Prosperity Element is a new element combining the previous Commercial, Industrial, and Redevelopment elements. It provides comprehensive and cohesive citywide policies to address employment land availability, regional infrastructure, business development, education and workforce development, the jobs-housing balance, and border issues.

Public Facilities, Services, and Safety- The Public Facilities, Services, and Safety Element addresses public facility standards and guidelines and the equitable provision of public facilities and services throughout the city. The Element provides policy direction on citywide priorities for facilities, guidance for community plan facilities elements, financing options for public facilities, and establishes policies to maintain service levels as the population grows.

Recreation- The Recreation Element sets forth policies to improve equitable public access to recreational resources and facilities, protect and enhance population and resource based parks and open space, and expand options for how communities can meet existing park and recreation standards. This Element also establishes and refines recreation standards that are flexible but provide an equivalent level of service.

Conservation- The Conservation Element addresses resource conservation and preservation, pollution prevention, and sustainable environmental practices. Conservation policies seek to achieve healthy natural ecosystems, and to protect and enhance the quality of life in San Diego for existing and future generations. Policy topics include landform preservation, water supply, biological diversity, waste management and efficient building design among others.

Noise- The Noise Element includes policies to establish a pattern of land uses and noise abatement procedures to ensure that future development and redevelopment minimizes the exposure of community residents to excessive noise. The Element is especially important as the City of San Diego begins to target growth into specific commercial infill areas consistent with transit-oriented development design guidelines and with a mix of uses.

Housing- The Housing Element is updated in accordance with the five-year cycle mandated by state law and is produced under separate cover. It includes policies and programs to assist with the provision of adequate housing to serve San Diegans of every economic level and demographic group.



General Plan Structure

Planning is critical to assist a city in its evolution, as well as to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its residents. The State of California considers the general plan to be a “constitution for development,” the foundation upon which all land use decisions in a city or county are to be based. It expresses community vision and values, and it embodies public policy relative to the distribution of future land use, both public and private. Recognizing this, state law requires each city (and county) to adopt a General Plan to guide its future, and mandates through the Government Code that the plan be periodically updated to assure its relevance and utility. It also requires the inclusion of seven mandatory elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Noise, Open Space, and Safety.

In addition, State law permits the inclusion of optional elements which address needs, objectives, or requirements particular to that city or county.

The General Plan contains the Strategic Framework and Land Use Element, which also includes more than fifty community, specific, precise, and subarea plans, and eight additional elements to address issues of citywide and regional significance. State law requires internal consistency, meaning that no policy conflicts can exist, either textual or diagrammatic, between components of the General Plan, including community plans and optional elements and that no one element may take precedence over another.

Planning Context

The City of San Diego General Plan is designed to complement and support long-range growth management strategies throughout the region. The city continues to coordinate and work closely with the regional land use and transit planning agency the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). The objective to increase residential and employment concentrations in areas with the best existing and future transit connections supports regional planning goals and transit vision.

The City of San Diego plays a leading role in regional planning. This role includes working with other cities and agencies in refining the regional arterial transportation network, expanding transit services, developing a long-term airport solution for the region, assuring availability of adequate sources of water and utilities for urban needs, and achieving goals for a regional open space network. Beginning in the 1990s, officials representing the cities of San Diego and Tijuana entered into an unprecedented partnership to collaborate on issues that impact citizens on both sides of the U.S. - Mexico border.



Implementation and Monitoring

A critical component to this new General Plan is an on-going implementation program. The City Council took an important step toward that end when adopting the Strategic Framework Action Plan as a companion document to the Strategic Framework Element in 2002. The Action Plan serves as the framework for the city-wide work program to implement the General Plan.

The Action Plan identifies actions to be taken, the “Lead Department(s)” to further the action, whether staff funding is available to work on the item, potential public and private sector partners who should be involved, and which action items have the highest priority for implementation. Major Actions identified in the Action Plan include the update and adoption of this General Plan and the city’s community plans.

It also recommends actions to re-examine, revise, and create new city policies, regulations, standards, and processes to be consistent with the Element. In addition, the Action Plan directs that a financing strategy be prepared and new revenue sources be secured to fund infrastructure improvements and increased village amenities. Finally, the Action Plan’s Monitoring Program will measure the Sustainable Community Program Indicators, individual Action Items, and economic indicators.

Implementation will also occur through amendments and updates to community plans and individual development, including public projects, throughout the city.

Conclusion

A century after Nolen, San Diego is once again anticipating its future and defining new strategies for the way we will live on the land for the next 20-50 years. The challenges require new approaches, sound public policies, and innovative and achievable solutions – in sum, a new General Plan.



Housing Element Status

The Housing Element differs from the other elements in the General Plan in several respects.

The state requirements for Housing Elements are more specific than for other General Plan elements and require that, in addition to strategies and policies such as are found in other elements, quantifiable goals be established and specific programs be identified to meet these goals. Therefore, the format of the Housing Element differs significantly from that of the other elements.

California state law requires that the Housing Element be updated every five to seven years. By contrast, the remainder of the General Plan is designed to guide development during a twenty or twenty-five year period. The Housing Element has been updated several times since the last General Plan update in 1979. In addition, Housing Elements for all jurisdictions in San Diego County are required to be updated at the same time and to cover the period 2005-2010. Therefore, the 2005-2010 Housing Element is proceeding on a parallel but somewhat different timeline from the remainder of the General Plan. A first discussion draft has been completed and shared with a Housing Element Working Group. The city's goal has been to complete the Housing Element in summer or fall 2005 and have it fully adopted by the end of 2005.

The State Housing and Community Development Department and SANDAG set specific five to seven year housing production goals for each jurisdiction. Specific goals are set for production of very low, low and moderate income housing units. Each jurisdiction is required to prepare a detailed inventory of sites available to be developed with housing during a five to seven year period, an analysis of how the city met its goals and implemented programs from the previous Housing Element and a description of new programs to meet anticipated needs during the next five years.

For additional information regarding the Housing Element of the General Plan, please contact Bill Levin at 619-235-5214 or wlevin@sanidiego.gov.